

## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Steve Cecil, Deputy Commissioner,  
Office of Planning and Intermodal  
Transportation

FROM: Cristine M. Klika, Commissioner

DATE: February 24, 2000

RE: INDOT Policies Concerning Tier 1 EIS for Proposed Extension of I-69 from  
Indianapolis to Evansville

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This coming month, the first round of public meetings will be held for the new study of the proposed Evansville-to-Indianapolis portion of I-69. As we move forward with this study, it is essential for everyone involved to work toward a single goal: *completing a fair and objective analysis of all reasonable alternatives, based on the most current information available, with full participation by all interested agencies, individuals, and groups.*

With that goal in mind, I would like to clarify and reiterate several important policy decisions that have shaped our decision to proceed with this new study and that will continue to be followed until this study is completed. These policies address three broad issues: purpose-and-need, alternatives, and public involvement.

### **SUMMARY**

- **Purpose and Need.** We must take a *fresh look* at the needs to be addressed by the proposed Evansville-to-Indianapolis project, using the latest available data and the most current modeling tools and other technical capabilities. This effort should take into account the needs associated with the proposed Corridor 18/I-69 project.
- **Alternatives.** We must ensure that the study evaluates a *broad range* of alternatives for meeting the project's objectives. This effort should involve the following actions:
  - **Generating a Broad Range of Alternatives.** We must develop a broad range of alternatives, including new alternatives that have the potential to provide environmentally responsible, cost-effective solutions to our transportation needs.
  - **Selecting Alternatives for Detailed Study.** We must take a balanced, common-sense approach to selecting the set of alternatives that will be studied in detail, giving careful attention to the value of studying a geographically diverse range of alternatives. The No-Build alternative also must remain on the table.

- Conducting Detailed Studies of Reasonable Alternatives. We must develop reliable, comprehensive data about the benefits, impacts, and costs of each alternative that is carried forward for detailed study, in enough detail to allow an informed, even-handed comparison of the alternatives.
- Public Involvement. We must consistently involve the public in all stages of the process. To do this, we must focus our efforts in two areas:
  - Making Information Widely Available. We must remain committed to making information about the project widely available on an ongoing basis, through a wide range of communication methods.
  - Creating Opportunities for Input. We must create specific opportunities for the public to provide input before key decisions are made.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

### **I. Purpose and Need.**

Until relatively recently, the Department's study efforts in the Indianapolis-to-Evansville corridor focused on a proposed Bloomington-to-Evansville highway, which was mainly intended to address transportation and economic development needs in Southwest Indiana. Then, in November 1998, Commissioner Wiley announced that the Department would expand that study to include the entire Indianapolis-to-Evansville corridor. Based on that decision, a new study has been initiated. The focus of this new study is the completion of an Indianapolis-to-Evansville project, as part of a "high-priority corridor" stretching from Canada to Mexico.

Given this change of direction, we must begin this new study by developing a new purpose-and-need statement. As indicated above, the basic purpose of the project has already been established: it is intended to provide an improved transportation link between Evansville and Indianapolis, as part of the proposed Corridor 18/I-69 high-priority corridor. However, in order to build a strong foundation for this study, we must develop up-to-date information about the specific transportation needs that would be addressed by this project, including the need for transportation improvements to expand economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in Southwest Indiana. As part of this effort, we must take into account the latest travel demand data, as well as relevant planning decisions, recent legislation, and the views of the public. In short, we must spell out in detail the needs this project would address and the criteria we will use to determine whether an alternative adequately meets those needs.

### **II. Alternatives.**

Because the previous study focused on alternatives for completing an Evansville-to-Bloomington project, it considered only a limited set of alternatives for connecting Evansville to Indianapolis. Therefore, just as we must reassess our project objectives in light of the expanded scope of this study, we also must take a fresh look at the alternatives for completing the Indianapolis-to-Evansville project. Under the approved scope of work for this study, the

alternatives analysis should proceed in three steps: a scoping stage, in which a broad range of alternatives is developed; a screening stage, in which a set of alternatives is selected for detailed study; and a final stage in which all of the reasonable alternatives are studied in detail.

**Generating a Broad Range of Alternatives.** The first step toward completing a comprehensive study is to make sure that all *potentially* reasonable alternatives are put on the table at the very beginning of the process. To make sure this happens, we must *actively seek out new alternatives* – for example, new-terrain corridors that have not previously received any significant public attention, as well as possible combinations of new-terrain corridors and upgrades to existing routes. This effort should involve intensive public outreach efforts early in the process, as well as our own independent efforts to identify potentially reasonable alternatives. In short, we must engage the public, other agencies, and our consultant team in a collective “brainstorming” effort to generate alternatives for consideration in this study.

**Selecting Alternatives for Detailed Study.** Once a broad range of alternatives has been developed, we will need to screen those alternatives in order to identify a set of reasonable alternatives for detailed study. In making this decision, we will consider – as we do in every study – the ability of each alternative to achieve the project’s basic objectives. But in a study of this nature, we must be particularly careful to avoid prematurely eliminating alternatives that may later be found to have significant advantages in terms of environmental impacts or costs. Therefore, we should seek to carry forward a *geographically diverse range of alternatives* in order to allow maximum flexibility in selecting a preferred alternative. As required by law, we also must carry the “No Action” alternative forward throughout the entire process.

**Conducting Detailed Studies of Reasonable Alternatives.** We must develop reliable, comprehensive data about the benefits, impacts, and costs of each alternative that is carried forward for detailed study. This information should be developed to whatever level of detail is necessary in order to allow an informed, even-handed comparison of alternatives. In some cases, this approach may allow for a lower level of detail in this Tier 1 EIS than is typically provided in an EIS. But in other cases, this approach may actually warrant a comparable (or even higher) level of detail. All of this information should be developed using the most current information sources and information management tools, including the GIS database where appropriate.

### **III. Public Involvement.**

As you are aware, there is widespread interest among the public in the study that we are about to undertake. There also is skepticism and even distrust among some individuals and groups, on all sides of the issue, who are concerned that their views and concerns will not be fairly addressed. In this situation, it is imperative that we go well beyond our normal public involvement efforts. Our enhanced public-involvement program for this study is intended to achieve two goals: (1) making information about the study *widely* accessible to the public, as it is developed; and (2) providing *meaningful* opportunities for the public to provide input *before* key decisions are made.

**Making Information Widely Available.** To ensure that information is widely distributed, the scope of work for this study requires the consultant team to employ a wide range

of public involvement techniques, from traditional methods (such as newsletters and public meetings) to more innovative techniques, such as focus groups, a project web site, and a 24-hour telephone hotline. We must actively monitor the effectiveness of these communication techniques as the study proceeds. If they are not working, we must re-evaluate our approach and make the necessary adjustments. The bottom line: we must do what it takes to ensure that the public receives timely information about the progress of this study.

**Allowing Public Input *Before* Key Decisions are Made.** To enhance opportunities for public involvement in decision-making, the scope of work calls for public meetings to be held at several key decision points *during* the study process. At a minimum, these decision points will include (1) approval of the purpose-and-need statement; (2) the decision about which alternatives to carry forward for detailed analysis – i.e., the “screening” of alternatives; and (3) the selection of a preferred alternative. At each of these points, an opportunity will be provided for full public participation *before* any final decision is made. This opportunity will be provided through the following procedures:

- **Circulate Proposed Decision.** First, information will be publicly distributed explaining the proposed decision before it is finalized. This information will be made available to the public on the project web site and by other appropriate means.
- **Allow Public and Agency Input.** After the information is distributed, the public and the resource agencies will be given an opportunity to submit comments. This step normally will include a full round of public meetings or hearings at multiple locations in the project area. (Public meetings are scheduled for each of the three decision points mentioned above.)
- **Consider Comments and Announce Decision.** After receiving input from the public, the Department in consultation with FHWA will consider the public comments and then make a decision about how to proceed with the next stage of the study. The decision will be promptly made available to the public on the project web site and by other appropriate means.

Together, these public involvement procedures will ensure an unprecedented opportunity for public participation *during* the development of the Tier 1 Draft EIS. At times, these procedures may appear to slow the process down or create unnecessary delays. But in the long run, this approach will expedite the study by helping us to identify important issues and concerns *early*, when they can be addressed most efficiently and effectively.

#### **IV. Conclusion.**

As stated above, our goal in this process is *not* to defend a particular alternative, nor is it to respond narrowly to specific requests for additional study of a particular alternative. Instead, our goal is to complete a fair and objective analysis of *all* reasonable alternatives. In the end, if we achieve that goal, it is my hope that we will lay the foundation for building a broad consensus on how to address the transportation and economic needs in Southwestern Indiana. I look forward to working with you to make that goal a reality.